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ABSTRACT

One response to the call to go back-to-basics is to teach conventions of writing and usage which seem to echo the objectivity and rigor of scientific knowledge. Yet Michael Polanyi gives reason to believe that the "objectivist" concept of science itself is misleading. Polanyi offers a subtly, but fundamentally, different conception which undergirds achievements of knowing in the sciences and elsewhere, a concept of tacit knowing. Because his resulting epistemology is strikingly coherent with rhetorical theory, because classroom practices are based on a competing concept of science which Polanyi rejects, and because the habits and attitudes of students unfortunately reflect debilitating objectivist traits which Polanyi has analyzed, there is ample warrant for further study of Michael Polanyi, and there is hope that such study will help to identify what really is basic to the teaching of writing. (Author/AA)

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DISCOURSING TACITLY OR BACK TO THE WRONG BASICS

For Rhetorical Theory Section, Annual Conference on College Composition and Communication. Philadelphia, March 25-27, 1976. Conference theme: "What's Really Basic?"

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DISCOURSING TACITLY OR BACK TO THE WRONG BASICS

ABSTRACT

Called by voices increasingly strident to go "back to the basics" of composition, we may respond by more vigorously embracing and teaching commonplaces we now accept without much question--of hard facts determined by objective observation and of formal proofs. Those commonplaces are based on a widely-shared idea of what science is, one which assumes science to be impersonal, exact, and indubitable. Yet Michael Polanyi gives reason to believe that this "objectivist" concept of science is disastrously misleading, fueling tremendously persuasive and mindless contemporary ideologies, which threaten decisively to undercut cultural activities, including those of science. Polanyi offers a subtly but fundamentally different conception which undergirds achievements of knowing in the sciences and elsewhere, a concept of "tacit knowing." Because his resulting epistemology is strikingly coherent with rhetorical theory, because our own classroom practice is based on a competing concept of science which Polanyi rejects, and because habits and attitudes of our students unfortunately reflect debilitating objectivist traits which Polanyi has analyzed in ideologies, there is ample warrant for our further study of Michael Polanyi and there is hope that such study will help us not mis-identify what truly is basic to our endeavors.

For fun and profit, one question we students of language could ask ourselves is, "What difference might the pedagogical commonplaces which inhabit our composition classrooms be making?" Beneath their gaudy covers, the dulling sameness of most current texts suggests that question has not occurred to most text writers or choosers, though it may have motivated convention-goers.

When I mention possible profit from a composition class, perhaps you are thinking grimly of your salary check; and as for "fun," why surely that has no place in a properly professional demeanor, certainly not in composition, while our students do not have even "the basics."

What difference might those commonplaces be making? As we think back to students' blank faces and to sheets of paper that, beneath illegible scrawls, seem similarly blank, perhaps our weary response is, "not much." But a more appropriate answer might just be "the wrong kind."

That is a possibility probed in this paper, a paper motivated by the current cry to go "Back to the Basics." I do not know what those "basics" are; no one has yet told me. But I do know that from colleagues and laymen the injunction to get back to them comes from thin, tight-stretched lips and grim jaws of uniformly frowning faces, which seem to see themselves as upholders of some sort of rigorously defined and enforceable standards and as thereby cloaked in intellectual respectability. I recall the colleague who bustled into my office, red-penned student essay in hand, interrupting a conference with a particularly reticent student whom I had just managed to lure in. "Look at this, Sam," he exclaimed. "This student can't use apostrophes; he doesn't have even the basics of composition." I remember more vividly the response of my student after the colleague had left: "My own English is awful; it makes me ashamed"; clearly that student would use no more of it than he absolutely had to. I think of another student, just finishing an advanced composition course: "Before this course, I was so worried about the basics of writing that I messed up on content," she said. Then there was the colleague who insisted that Robert Pirsig uphold quality in his

composition classes, before tripping merrily off to water her plants, leaving him to go quietly mad.[1] Grim determination (or is it despair?) is stamped on colleagues' faces as they talk of the need for "basics," an attitude a world away from the loves which led them to English in the first place.

When such disjunctions can be discovered, such concerns conveyed, something may be basically wrong within our discipline, among the presuppositions which inform the "Back to the Basics" call itself. Perhaps, in questioning some of those presuppositions, this paper smacks of philosophy; but then, basic issues do have a way of turning philosophical. If any "Basics" folks feel that composition gets lost in philosophical labyrinths, they could always shift their slogan: "Back to the Basics" could be replaced by "In Support of the Superficial." That also alliterates, and it may be a more accurate guide to what some true believers have in mind. It may also be an unwitting consequence of those commonplaces which inhabit our classrooms.

What are they? You may find the following sketch indicative and familiar: To place first things first, students must demonstrate mastery of the conventions of standard spelling, punctuation, and usage, and preferably they should be able to recite the "grammatical" terminology and rules for standard usage. A subject must be narrowed until it can be "discussed thoroughly" in 500 words (or whatever), and a thesis statement must be formed which can be logically "proven" in that length. Factual evidence is what counts and explicit, demonstrated proof and objectivity. Students must form a "critical attitude," doubting where possible and proving what seems not open to doubt. As Wayne Booth says,

> You may...have been taught, as I was, that <u>to be reasonable</u>... means taking an absolutely neutral ground until solid proof is available--which in fact amounts to making the negative decision, to deny credence. Since nothing has been proved, an educated man will wait for real evidence.[2]

For our own part, our materials must be displayed logically, taught with utter clarity, our expectations specified explicitly, and out students' papers

graded rigorously. If our students fail to learn, it is a sign of unbearable laziness on their part or a failure of logic, clarity, explicitness, and rigor on ours. As a colleague put it recently, "In my composition class I call all the shots." It is a tough-minded, no-nonsense attitude, or at least it seems to be. I have known teachers for whom it betokened a laudable exercise of professional responsibility and classroom effectiveness. There is much in the sketch we would all embrace: Accepting students' rights to their own language need make no one an advocate of illiteracy, and none of us would wish to condone sloppiness of argument. Certainly the "basics" sketched here are an attempt to get at fundamentals, and that is a worthy aim--unless fundamentals turn into fundamentalism.

Where do those commonplaces come from? Booth again provides a reliable clue:

> Accepting without question the dogmas of scientism, [many freshman English texts] have taught--as I accuse myself of having taught, during my first losing battles with freshman composition--that the goal of all thought and argument is to emulate the purity and objectivity and rigor of science, in order to protect oneself from the errors that passion and desire and metaphor and authority and all those logical fallacies lead us into.[3]

Their source is science, or more accurately a widely shared "objectivist" understanding of what science is. The common exhortations to utter criticism, neutrality, objectivity and to decisions deferred lead Booth to declare bluntly, "It is part of my point...that we were taught wrong."[4] Booth's disquiet is arresting, and its source may go deeper than he realizes.

And that brings us to Michael Polanyi, research chemist, philosopher, and my major guide throughout this paper. The issue which called Polanyi to philosophy is akin to the grim-lipped impass which I believe "the basics" issue threatens us with. His analysis reveals that the "objectivist" view of science implied in our commonplaces has unwittingly threatened scientific activity itself in our century; his analysis and the subtle but significant epistemological reform he

proposes should give us instructive pause.

The motivating issue for Polanyi is the virulent growth of mindless ideologies in the twentieth century--particularly illustrated by German Naziism and Russian Communism--and the threat to free thought, in the sciences and elsewhere, which these ideologies represent. As Polanyi states:

> I first met questions of philosophy when I came up against the Soviet ideology under Stalin which denied justification to the pursuit of science....this denial of the very existence of independent scientific thought came from a socialist theory which derived its trememdous persuasive power from its claim to scientific certainty. The scientific outlook appeared to have produced a mechanical conception of man and history in which there was no place for science itself.[5]

Ideological threats are a logical culmination of the objectivist outlook. That outlook sanctions critical and universal doubt to consume the dross of opinion and belief, leaving knowledge pure and indubitable. Observable facts alone are real; therefore the real is the tangible. Its methods encompass impersonal, detached observation and logical (or mathematical) operations performed on the reports of those observations; all other sorts of statements, including statements of opinion, are essentially arbitrary and literally non-sensical. It is an ideal of rigor. Rigorously enforced, as one of its adherents says, "The opinion of the wise man is on a par with that of an ignoramus."[6] And it insists that even scientific theories are merely convenient summaries of past experiences, to be immediately overturned when evidence in conflict with them is discovered. There is no doubt that this general outlook has led to tremendous scientific gains, which Polanyi considers "perhaps the most fruitful effort ever sustained by the human mind."[7] But in our century objectivism has unwittingly undermined freedom of thought and "having first exalted science to the seat of universial arbitrament, now threatens to overthrow and destroy it."[8]

How could the objectivist logic entail such consequences? First, its increasingly radical skepticism renders it increasingly difficult to take seriously the reasons men give for their actions. "Reasons" are ruthlessly reduced to the self-

serving "motives" they are claimed actually to be.[9] Freedom and dignity are delusions; so is responsibility. Man's apparent actions are forced upon him, determined by environmental factors and by essentially selfish drives over which he has no control.

The scientist is not exempt from this analysis. Pure science, the pursuit of truth for its own sake, is simply a delusion. Science is really technology, and the directions of scientific work should be set by those who can best see what technological advances would bring practical, social benefit. The scientist's autonomy is thus sacrificed to the political ruler.

Second, if there is no middle ground between the certain and the arbitrary, then there can be no way to address or indeed even to perceive a problem, which we know in some ways but which, if we knew clearly, would not be problematic. Denying any intrinsic powers of thought and allowing only passive accumulation of objectively defined facts, objectivism denies that one can strive purposefully for a problem's solution, including the solutions which comprise scientific discoveries.

Third, because discourse of reasons is unmasked, it becomes inconceivable that persons can constitute autonomous communities, partly through discourses. More particularly, if all opinions are equally worthless, there is no need for communities of scientists to act as arbiters of scientific opinion.

In sum, then, objectivism's logic implies that science should be in the service of practical needs. It can offer no account of scientific discovery; and it cannot sanction the existence of scientific communities. Offering no defense of scientific autonomy, the ideological manifestations now threaten to undermine the very enterprises objectivism was intended to undergird, a threat which has been grimly realized in totalitarianisms of our century.

What does that have to do with us? Richard Weaver writes, "A culture is responsive to the prevailing image of man. For what man tells himself he is manifests itself soon enough in what he does and may even predetermine what he

can do."[10] Our objectivist commonplaces might encourage unfortunate consequences in our discipline. Informed by Polanyi's analysis, we should listen to our students; many of them accept without question a generally objectivist framework.

"What use is this going to be to me?" is a question we all have heard. It is an essentially technological question, and it often arises from a framework wherein only technological issues can be real. And from an objectivist position we can give only a technological answer, muttering about writing-skills-needed-to-get-through-college-with, though we know full well that past freshman composition many students will never be required to write another paper.

Under objectivism, all opinions are equally arbitrary. You have heard the questions: "Is it really all right to include my own opinions?" or "It's my opinion; don't I have a right to my own opinion"--a question invariably used to close off debate, not to open it. Facts are self-evident and indubitable; inquiry is a matter passively of collecting them; doing a paper is a matter of passively cutting, pasting, and typing them together. Grappling with a genuine problem is illegitimate if not literally unthinkable: "I can't find information on" often translates, "I can't find the ready-made answer to." You have seen the resulting papers--formlessly "about" subjects, however limited, rather than grappling purposefully with issues, however complex, papers at the best which are conscientiously chock-full of undigested "facts," "facts" often only in the ironic sense that they are the opinions of authorities who managed to get into print. And you have heard the presumption that there exists some single methodology which guarantees success, some universal solvent, some One Right Way to do any paper or certainly to do the assignment at hand, a notion which informs that frequent question, "Just what do you want in this paper?" Presumably there is a single Right Answer, and it is guaranteed by some infallible methodology which teacher has clearly in mind but refuses to explain.

Because discoursing could not possibly be a matter of constituting, perpetuating, and correcting communities, taking composition must hold the promise of practical

gain; it must be a matter of having enforced upon one the specifiable features of usage which find favor from some ruling class. Composition can be perceived as the most repressive course around, where the highest aim is not to achieve significance but to avoid mistakes. In short, many of the student attitudes which we probably find most frustrating are grounded in an objectivist framework. But our bits of pedagogical advice also are informed by objectivist assumptions. Perhaps student attitudes are showing us unfortunate consequences of our own advice; if so, no wonder we find ourselves frustrated; if so, like Polanyi himself we should seek a more satisfactory alternative.

"I believe that in spite of the hazards involved, I am called upon to search for the truth and state my findings."[11] That statement is central to Polanyi's philosophical endeavors. It may seem modest, but it is utterly crucial, and under objectivism it makes no sense: it is a statement of belief, which the objectivist exorcises from the realm of knowledge; it signals an acceptance of responsibility, which under objectivism seems hypocritical or naive; it acknowledges hazards, whereas objectivist methodology assures certainty; it promises actively to seek, rather than passively to observe; and it seeks truth, rather than convenient summaries of observations. The purpose of Polanyi's epistemological reform, which is generalized in his understanding of intellectual communities, is to establish grounds on which that claim makes sense.

"We can know more than we can tell."[12] That maxim points to the central insight of Polanyi's epistemology; we know in two quite different ways: We can know explicitly something to which we are attending and which we may be able to name, and we know tacitly the clues from which we take our bearings on that entity, clues which we literally or metaphorically embody and which therefore we can never fully specify. Polanyi states:

> The triad of tacit knowing consists in subsidiary things...bearing on a focus...by virtue of an integration performed by the person; ...in tacit knowing we attend from one or more subsidiaries to a focus on which the subsidiaries are brought to bear.[13]

The dynamics are illustrated even in perception, "the most impoverished form of tacit knowing."[14] In perceiving something, I attend from innumerable clues, in the object, in its context, and some--for example eye contractions and simultaneous but distinct retinal images--within my body itself. I am committed to my own body as a generally reliable instrument; I accredit myself as a knower. Though a particular perception may be mistaken, its validity can in no way be formally "proven." For one thing, I cannot exhaustively specify the clues which inform my perception. For another, a coherent perception is never merely the equivalent of the clues which point toward it. Interpretive effort makes the difference, bridging the gap which separates clues from perception. Finally, to attempt to specify and test a clue is to destroy, at least for that time, its function as clue. Granted that such specifications, though never complete, can contribute to higher or more satisfactory integrations: A pianist might well improve his technique by studying his finger movements, but to attend to those movements while attempting to play would be temporarily to paralyze his skill. Something serving as clue "ceases to do so when focal attention is directed on it."[15] To insist on the specification of the clues informing a perception would be to destroy them as clues and therefore to destroy the perception, leaving only a "boundless variety of raw experience... devoid of all meaning."[16]

Knowing, even in the case of perception, is revealed to be a purposeful activity, demanding effort and risking failure. It is carried out on grounds we accept a-critically and cannot fully specify. If the objectivist ideal were taken strictly, no knowledge could meet its rigorous specifications. But the analysis shows instead that the objectivist ideal is mistaken; in the process, it also establishes grounds for the heuristic enterprise implied in Polanyi's calling, "to search for the truth," though the fruits of that search cannot claim certainty.

A person can recognize a genuine problem only by rendering tacit the clues which point vaguely towards it, making those clues part of himself and thereby attending from them to something not yet seen. Mastery of an intellectual

discipline is shown not by a person's replication of its findings or by his explicit memorization of them but by the interpretive use he is able to make of the discipline, a use increasingly open to him as he renders his discipline increasingly tacit, working through an arduous apprenticeship to embody it as a generally reliable guide to coherences as yet unseen. Recognition of a genuine problem in a discipline is a highly skilled activity, open only to persons who indwell the discipline. The epistemology of tacit knowing thus underwrites the autonomy of inquiry.

The search for a solution is likewise highly skilled, in ways it would not need to be if methodology were utterly rigorous, precise, and explicit. The scientist, say, pours himself into his search, committing his time, energy, and intellectual passions, striving with no guarantee of success to see what no one has seen before. This search is skilled; it also is hazardous. At each step of the way he guides his own activities, relying on an embodied interpretive framework which he has neither time, skill, nor attention to replicate, deciding on grounds he cannot fully specify to follow certain leads and ignore others, thus accrediting as generally reliable his own powers of thought and judgment which he cannot exhaustively specify or formally prove. Because his activities are thus grounded in tacit processes, he risks choosing a problem he will be unable to solve, and he risks being mistaken in thinking he has achieved a discovery.

Furthermore, to solve a problem is to change, however slightly, the framework which pointed toward the problem but left it problematic, a framework the scientist has rendered part of himself. The discovery

> changes the world as we see it, by deepening our understanding of it. The change is irrevocable....Having made a discovery, I shall never see the world as before....I have made myself into a person seeing and thinking differently. I have crossed a gap, the heuristic gap which lies between problem and discovery.[17]

To engage in inquiry is to risk an existential change, a risk realized to the extent that the heuristic effort seems successful.

If science were what objectivism implies, no problems could be addressed and no hazards would be involved in scientific work. And it would not be necessary, having searched for the truth, to state one's findings.

In the various disciplines, communities of peers exist, not only to guide and accredit new members. Because inquiry is hazardous, communities also must exist to judge proferred findings. Eminent members are made referees of conventions and journals; they evaluate contributions and refuse publication to outlandish claims, without conclusive proof that the claims are mistaken, an enterprise for which referees would not have time, inclination, or ability. Judgments of plausibility are balanced against judgments of originality, the extent to which a contribution seems successfully to address a genuine problem in the field. If granted an audience, the author seeks to have his peers share his new conviction. His appeal, like his inquiry, is rooted in the tacit beliefs, the commonly shared opinions and communally set standards, which render his contribution plausible to his fellows.

However, to the extent that a discovery is original, the inquirer cannot convince his peers of it merely by formal argument within the shared framework, a framework which had left the problem problematic:

> Like the heuristic passion from which it flows, the <u>persuasive passion</u> too finds itself facing a logical gap....[The discoverer's] persuasive passion spurs him now to cross this gap by converting everybody to his way of seeing things, even as his heuristic passion has spurred him to cross the heuristic gap which separated him from discovery.[18]

If a contribution is original, strictly logical argument must be supplemented by persuasion.

As audience, the community must decide whether to be persuaded. And it must decide in the absence of logically compelling proof, partly so that "verification" of the discovery may eventually be uncovered.

An intellectual community, in short, is always making decisions and undertaking commitments based on clues which are not logically compelling, its actions informed by a body of opinion which exists in the interest of its own renewal, a

set of sophisticated and commonly shared but to some extend unarticulated beliefs and standards. If inquiry could be rigorous and explicit, these dynamics would not be necessary. Neither would discourse among a community's members. Indeed, Polanyi states, "Tacit sharing of knowing underlies every single act of articulate communication."[19] In Polanyi's analysis, purposelessness and, ultimately, silence is the sole alternative to discoursing tacitly.

There has not been opportunity to sketch it here but Polanyi's epistemology, defending autonomy of inquiry, sanctions inquiry at all levels of comprehensive entities, from the relatively restricted (and relatively explicit and exact) fields of mathematics, physics, and chemistry, to the enormously more encompassing (and largely tacit) character of aesthetics, religion, and ethics.[20] Rather than a model based on the "exact sciences" and not true even there, Polanyi offers a model where "Science, conceived as understanding nature, seamlessly joins with the humanities, bent on the understanding of man and human greatness."[21] Throughout, Polanyi sees "All thought is incarnate; it lives by the body and by the favour of society."[22]

What does Polanyi say to us, teachers of composition? Addressed by that question directly, he remains tacit; he forces no doctrine upon us. Indeed his philosophy, as well as the personal bearing of this modest man, is a caution against the doctrinaire. Some of us have found that various "personalist" philosophies have the same potential for ideology and mindlessness that Polanyi analyzes in objectivism. Arguing against ideology, Polanyi would not have us embrace any philosophy including his own in that way. In fact, his thought may help us understand when an idea turns ideological; perhaps that happens when statements are only explicit, becoming deep sleep phrases divorced from the tacit understanding, the personal backing, of their spokesmen.[23] One of Polanyi's aims has been to re-establish grounds for "the efficacy of reasoned argument."[24] He urges us to do our own thinking, and he would encourage us to do much of it in just this sort of forum.

Dwelt in rather than on, however, I believe that Polanyi offers significant clues to our deeper comprehension of basic concerns in our field. I will sketch briefly only three.

First, just whose concern should composition be? A major implication of Polanyi, I believe, is that if our institutions serve educational rather than economic or penal purposes it cannot be ours alone. The clearest reason is the extensive practice which lies behind any effective piece of writing. Without practice, students can only attend to the implements of writing, the pen and the blank page, or to quotations and concepts still focal and inert, which must instead be rendered tacit; they can only be bewildered by the multi-form choices which must be made if significant statements are to emerge. They require more practice than one semester, one year, or even one discipline can give them. More fundamentally, Polanyi shows that the replication of facts, which requires only focal grasp or--even less--temporary memorization, is incomparably less testing than interpretation of material, which requires a mastery that has rendered it tacit and significant, pointing to coherences beyond itself. Writing certainly may not be the only form of interpretation, but it is one enterprise where interpretation is inescapable or where its absence is extraordinarily clear.

Furthermore, recall that standards--including standards of coherence--are set and set differently by different disciplines. To embody a discipline is to speak its language; if an instructor in any discipline refuses to listen to his students' language, there is much about their grasp of the discipline which will never be accessible to him. And, if we composition teachers speak in terms of some impersonal and formal "logic" which presumably obtains equally across all disciplines, we saddle ourselves with responsibilities our colleagues must bear but often are all too glad to relinquish.[25]

You have heard those colleagues. You have listened with grim amusement as they abjured reading essay tests or other student writing in their courses. The reason, sometimes stated, is the tremendous time and energy that would take; we

understand that reason all too well. But we have more frequently heard that reason cloaked in another: "objective" tests, usually restricted to replication, give more "sure" grades and allow rigorous enforcement of "standards," often represented in grade curves. And, from these same colleagues we hear, "Students can't write anyway," an assessment often accompanied by the charge, perhaps left diplomatically unstated, that "English departments are not doing their jobs." They must not be, since surely composition--like all other knowledge--consists of discrete and specifiable rules and bits of information and is therefore all precisely delimited and clearly teachable.

But language is by no means the sort of thing this objectivist orientation implies. Polanyi states:

> All human thought comes into existence by grasping the meaning and mastering the use of language.... Truly human intellect dwells in us only when our lips shape words and our eyes read print.[26]

To make the inevitably interpretive uses of language only the province of English Departments suggests that our colleagues elsewhere are devoted to covering information more than cultivating intelligence, to extending their sinecures more than educating their students. At the very least, the objectivist framework renders our colleagues ready for composition teachers alone to bear burdens which must be shared across disciplines instead.

Second, Polanyi may help us more adequately grasp the dynamics of writing and the concepts basic to our discipline. Any act of writing is informed by innumerable choices; an attempt to make those choices for students requires that teacher, rather than student, do the writing. An attempt to specify all those choices is literally impossible and may well be self-defeating, rendering focal for students many matters which must operate subsidiarily instead. There is no wonder that coherence often utterly disappears. Or that exhaustive comments and corrections on papers often overwhelm students. Or that maxims of significant structure, divorced from the tacit grounding and the tacit bearing on subjects and audiences which underwrite significance, are heard as absolute and arbitrary

dictates which may even be mutually contradictory.[27]

You have met a student, after he has "revised" some paper in strict accordance with your explicit directions and has returned to demand a higher grade. "I did everything you said," he enjoins; that may be quite true, and the paper may make even less sense than before. He has followed your explicit dictates; if you had wanted other changes, you should have specified them. Under an objectivist framework, his claim is legitimate and incorrigible. Under objectivism, there is no way to deal with significant problems; no way to see facts pointing beyond themselves to significant coherences yet ungrasped; no way to see suggested revisions similarly as clues to significant form, which if we illustrated them exhaustively would make the resulting discourse ours rather than our students'.

More generally, Polanyi promises powerfully needed orientations toward composing and communicating. Concerned with processes of discovery, he may help us make sense of the impassioned effort, the frustrations, the purposeful work which are not explicit on the printed page, though they are inherent to the process of composing significant discourse. A contextualist, he may help us recover those contextual notions of speakers (or writers), of subjects, and of audiences; since Aristotle invented his triangle, these notions have historically been basic to our discipline. Perhaps in Polanyi's tacit/explicit distinction the enthymeme is waiting to be rediscovered. That distinction might also help students to see the relations between details and generalizations, for example, and to understand that in a paper they are communicating not only information but themselves. Polanyi may help us to discover the legitimacy as well as the hazards of proofs that are emotional and ethical, as well as logical. Polanyi offers foundation to discourse's historical presumption that not all opinions are equally reasonable and that it thus makes sense to debate opinions, though such debate cannot conclude in certainty. "We can know more than we can tell" makes sensible the claim that discoursing is learned more than taught, a claim at least

as old as Isocrates.[28] It also should give us confidence in our knowledge of discourse, knowledge which we have but cannot rigorously specify.

Jerry Gill, a philosopher studying Polanyi, recently wrote, "It is when we reach the bedrock level that the logic of persuasion is seen to be that of tacit knowing."[29] Polanyi seems deeply coherent with concepts and concerns which historically have been absolutely basic to the oldest art of discourse we have; the ancients called it "rhetoric." Latent in his philosophy may be a vocabulary waiting to be recovered and deepend, one more accurate though to appearances less rigorous than the objectivist commonplaces which are our current stock-in-trade.[30]

The mention of those commonplaces introduces my third point and brings us back to the "basics" controversy. Our commonplaces--ofexplicit rules, logical rigor and objective proof--still are largely accepted as self-evident; perhaps they are the "basics" which advocates would have us go back to. But if Polanyi's analysis is at all correct, they are dangerously misleading in our discipline. Richard Lanham declares, "Ten years ago, freshman writing was incorrect and misspelled. Now it is mindless."[31] Our students often evade responsibility and purposeful effort through naive appeal to an objectivist epistemology, within which responsibility and purposeful effort cannot exist. Our colleagues--especially the ones who feel least secure--seem often to do the same thing. Their education and intellectual interests have not encouraged most of them to give serious thought to issues of composing. Instead of looking puzzled and vaguely inquisitive when questions of composition arise, their faces turn grim, determined, and blank; one suspects that "the basics" they then extoll are matters of specifiable rules, underwritten by tightly-clutched handbooks, rules invoked to demonstrate instructors' professional responsibility but also to mask those real questions about discoursing they have never allowed themselves to ask.

One must have sympathy, for that dynamic is well-intentioned. But it can easily be destructive. Polanyi points to that danger:

The consequences of striving for strictness are....

> [that] the actual subject matter is restricted to a fragment found suitable for formalization. This formalization, if carried out strictly, would produce a result that has no bearing on the subject matter.[32]

The more rigorously we restrict ourselves to "basics" which seem demonstrably right or wrong, the more vigorously we insist on all those standard objectivist virtues, the more we may unwittingly re-enforce in ourselves and our students beliefs about ourselves, our world, and our languages which render it difficult to achieve the significant discourse we would most like to see. There is utterly no denying that today many people have great difficulty writing well. But our objectivist commonplaces may entail the wrong sort of "basics"; they may be arcs of a vicious circle, completed by ever deeper exhaustion for us and frustrations for us and our students. Polanyi helps us see that danger, I believe, and at least to imagine a more promising alternative.

NOTES

[1]Robert M. Pirsig, Zen And the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance (New York: Bantam, 1975,)p. 175.

[2]Wayne C. Booth, Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974), p. 5.

[3]Booth, p. 88.

[4]Booth, p. 5.

[5]Michael Polanyi, The Tacit Dimension (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1967), p.3. The Tacit Dimension provides an accurate but very brief summary of Polanyi's thought, excluding the subsequent extensions of his last decade. Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy (New York: Harper, 1964) is his most extensive single work. Knowing and Being, ed. Marjorie Grene (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969) is an accessible collection of some major essays. For reliable guides to Polanyi's thought, see the Harry S. Broudy Articles (Note 25 below);Jerry Gill, "The Case for Tacit Knowledge," Southern Journal of Philosophy, 9 (1971), 49-59; Robert E. Innis, "Meaning, Thought and Language in Polanyi's Epistemology," Philosophy Today, 18 (1974), 47-67; Harry Prosch, "Polanyi's Tacit Knowing in the 'Classic' Philosophers," Journal of the British Society of Phenomenology, 4 (1973), 201-216; William T. Scott, "Une Nouvelle Affirmation de la Rationalite: l'epistemologie de M. Polanyi," Archives de Philosophie, 35 (1972), 7-31. See also Intellect and Hope: Essays in the Thought of Michael Polanyi, ed. Thomas A. Langford and William Poteat (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1968) for implications of Polanyi and for a thorough, though now somewhat dated, bibliography of works by and about him. Those interested should also know of The Polanyi Society, headed by Dean Frederick Kirschenmann, Curry College, Milton, Mass., 02186. Dues are minimal, and the contact with many of the persons noted above and a number of others in a wide variety of disciplines is invaluable.

[6]A. d'Abro, quoted in George W. Morgan, The Human Predicament: Dissolution and Wholeness (New York: Dell, 1970), p. 10.

[7]Personal Knowledge, p. 265.

[8]Polanyi, The Logic of Liberty: Reflections and Rejoinders (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 9.

[9]This is the problem which occupies Booth throughout his Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent, a work entensively influenced by Polanyi: "His Personal Knowledge is the most important critique of systematic doubt in the name of what I have called systematic assent" (p. xvii).

[10]Visions of Order: The Cultural Crisis of our Time (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), p. 134.

[11]Personal Knowledge, p. 299.

[12]See The Tacit Dimension, pp. 4,7: Personal Knowledge, p. x; Knowing and Being, pp. 142-3.

[13]Knowing and Being, p. 182.

[14]The Tacit Dimension, p. 7.

[15]"Logic and Psychology," American Psychologist, 23 (1968), p. 31.

[16]Knowing and Being, p. 114.

[17]Personal Knowledge, p. 143.

[18]Personal Knowledge, p. 150; cf. p. 172.

[19]Personal Knowledge, p. 203.

[20]See Polanyi, "What Is a Painting?" British Journal of Aesthetics, 10 (1970), 225-236; Harry Prosch, "Polanyi's Ethics," Ethics, 82 (1972), 91-113; Polanyi and Prosch, Meaning (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), passim.

[21]Personal Knowledge, p. xi. The other notes given here suggest the rich applications Polanyi has found in an extraordinary diversity of disciplines.

[22]Knowing and Being, p. 134.

[23]See Dallas M. High, "The Morality of Speaking," Lexington Theological Quarterly, 5 (1970), 64-75, reprinted as "Language, Life and Morality," Communication: Ethical and Moral Issues (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1972). See also High, Language, Persons, and Belief (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), passim.

[24]Science, Faith, and Society (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), p. 75.

[25]Grounded in Polanyi, Harry S. Broudy expands this argument in detail. See especially his "Some Potentials and Hazards of Educational Technology," Planning for Effective Utilization of Technology in Education (New York: Citation Press, 1969), 92-113. See also his "Science, Art, and Human Values," Science Teacher, 36 (1969), 23-28; also "The Life Uses of Schooling as a Field of Research," N.S.S.E. Yearbook (Chicago: National Society for the Study of Education, 1972), 219-238.

[26]Knowing and Being, p. 160.

[27]For one list, see Richard A. Lanham, Style: An Anti-Textbook (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1974), pp. 15-6. For Lanham's reading of Polanyi, see p. 140.

[28]See Against the Sophists, 12,15; Antidosis, 185-193. For sensitive commentaries on this issue, see H. I. Marrou, A History of Education in Antiquity, trans. George Lamb (New York: New American Library, 1956), pp. 119-136; Werner Jaeger, Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1954-61), III, pp. 46-155.

[29]"Saying and Showing: Radical Themes in Wittgenstein's On Certainty," Religious Studies, 3 (1974), p. 290.

[30]The arguments of exactitude versus efficacy lay at the heart of the ancients' concerns on the proper status of rhetoric. See Plato, Gorgias, esp. 462, 465; Phaedrus, 269. See also Jaeger, Paideia, II, pp. 130, 135, 158.

An article has just appeared which deepens that issue and some of the other arguments in this paper: Barry Brummett, "Some Implications of 'Process' or 'Intersubjectivity': Postmodern Rhetoric," Philosophy and Rhetoric, 9 (1976), 21-51. In Polanyi's focal/subsidiary distinction, Brummett finds a paradigm for reconciliation between experimental and humanistic approaches to rhetorical criticism; in the process, he provides a useful guide to philosophical matters which inform this issue.

In my dissertation, Michael Polanyi and the Recovery of Rhetoric (University of Iowa, 1973), I argue at length Polanyi's coherence with rhetorical theory.

[31] Style: An Anti-Textbook, p. 3.

[32] "Logic and Psychology," p. 37.